

Abstract 563

TITLE: Trends in Preservice Teachers' Knowledge, Attitudes, and Values About HIV/AIDS

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Prevention through education is the best way to combat HIV infection and other serious health problems, and experts agree that education must begin no later than seventh grade. Schools offer an appropriate setting for this education, but the capacity of regular classroom teachers to provide health and HIV education with knowledge and comfort may be limited by a lack of preservice education and by attitudes and values. Two surveys were administered to ascertain teacher education students' knowledge, attitudes, and values about HIV/AIDS.

METHODS: Survey 1 assessed HIV knowledge of 502 beginning preservice teachers at 29 randomly selected U.S. teacher training institutions. The survey included 20 knowledge questions pertaining to HIV/AIDS. Average knowledge scores ranged from 80-83 out of 100 points. Students' lowest knowledge scores were in areas of the effectiveness of latex condoms in preventing the spread of AIDS, the purpose of the drug AZT, and confidentiality requirements in PK-12 schools. Although small numbers of minority respondents make conclusions about racial differences difficult, lowest scores were seen among non-white minority students. To obtain more information about HIV knowledge of preservice teachers, and to over-sample African-American students, a second survey was administered in spring 1999 to 120 preservice teachers completing their degree programs at 12 randomly selected U.S. teacher training institutions. In addition to 21 knowledge questions, Survey 2 included 7 questions to elicit information about students' attitudes about HIV and values of teaching about HIV. Analysis of Survey 2 results is underway now.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite the fact that most survey respondents plan to teach elementary school, where the classroom teachers is required to be the primary health education provider in virtually every U.S. state, only 25% of students were required to take a health course as a graduation requirement. Ways to increase the knowledge and comfort of preservice teachers in health and HIV/AIDS prevention education are being tested by AACTE's Build a Future Without AIDS project.

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